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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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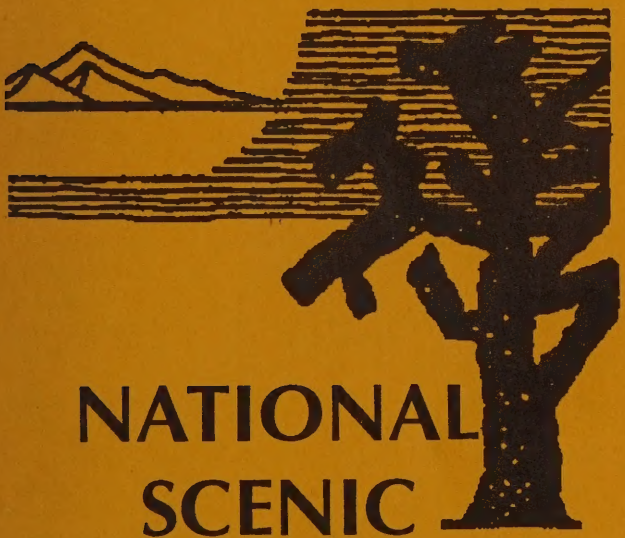
A TOUR OF THE EAST MOJAVE



NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

Secretary of the Interior
Manuel Lujan

May 19, 1989

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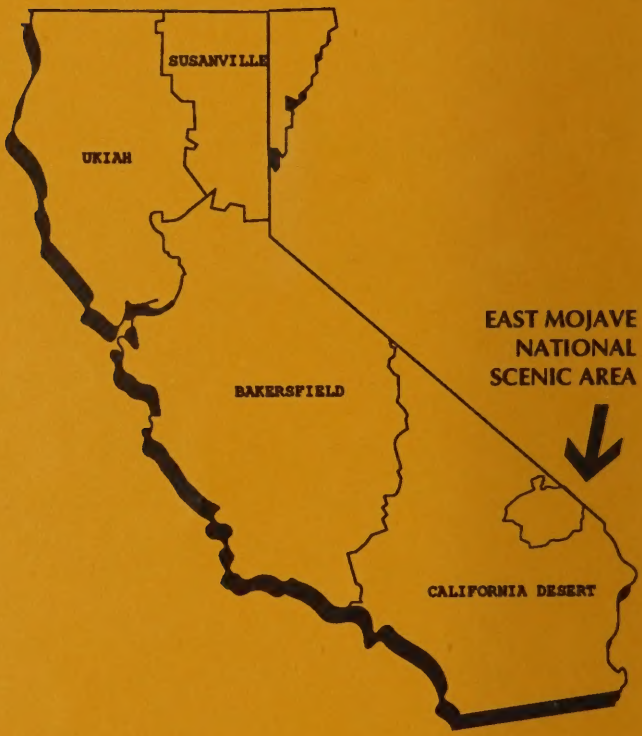
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

DISTRICTS



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WELCOME

To the Public Lands in California

It is a pleasure to welcome you to California and the public lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Statewide, BLM is responsible for more than 17 million acres of lands as well as 47 million acres of subsurface minerals. BLM-California also has jurisdiction over another 1.5 million acres in northwestern Nevada.

Most people don't realize it, but almost half of California is Federally owned. National Forests account for 20.4 million acres; BLM public lands 17.1 million; National Parks 4.6 million acres; military lands 4 million; and another 1 million acres managed by other Federal agencies.

This large percentage, combined with a rapidly growing population now totaling 28 million people, makes public land management a complex, highly visible operation. The challenge is to balance the tremendous need for resources with the State's strong public environmental ethic.

Today, you will be visiting an area where these conflicts are coming into sharp focus: the California Desert Conservation Area. It clearly illustrates BLM's challenge in carrying out the multiple use philosophy of the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

Your itinerary focuses on a unique expanse within the California Desert: the East Mojave National Scenic Area.

I hope you enjoy the day and find the trip informative. I'm sure your visit will help you better understand the Desert and its national importance.

Sincerely,

Ed Hastey

THE CALIFORNIA DESERT CONSERVATION AREA

The California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) covers almost one-quarter of California, or about 25 million acres. BLM manages about half that total, and the remainder includes 3 million acres controlled by the military; 2.5 million acres of national parks; 400,000 acres of State Parks; and 7 million acres of private and State lands.

Congress created the CDCA in 1976 and directed BLM to develop a balanced multiple use plan, with the public's help, to guide management of the area. Special emphasis was to be given to protection, recreation use, and wise development of the CDCA's public resources.

Caruthers Canyon in the East Mojave

BLM completed that plan in 1980, after spending $8 million and evaluating some 40,000 public comments. The plan was a compromise among all competing interests and balanced uses fairly. It was carefully coordinated with the State, counties, Department of Defense, National Park Service, Forest Service, and hundreds of individuals and groups who feel strongly about the Desert and its future.

The plan's balance was clearly demonstrated by the approval of two Administrations: Secretary Andrus under President Carter and Secretary Watt under President Reagan.

The backbone of the plan is the multiple use classes. These classes "zone" the desert into four major use categories, just like cities are zoned for various land uses. The allocations include: 2 million acres in Class C (controlled) proposed for wilderness designation; 6 million acres in Class L (limited) managed to protect sensitive resources; 3.3 million in Class M (moderate) managed in a controlled balance between use and protection; and 500,000 acres in Class I (intensive), managed to meet human needs.

Another key element of the Desert Plan was designation of 80 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) covering 670,000 acres. These areas contain special cultural or natural resources. An individual management plan has been or is being developed for each ACEC to ensure long-term protection.

Other Desert Plan elements included recreation, motorized vehicle access, energy production, livestock grazing, utility corridors, wildlife, and land tenure adjustment.

To respond to changing demands, the plan includes a periodic amendment process that includes full public involvement.

Finally, although planning is important, implementation is the real test of any land management effort. Hundreds of specific actions have been taken in the last nine years to carry out this plan and BLM has expended $65 million in this implementation effort.

THE EAST MOJAVE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

The East Mojave National Scenic Area (EMNSA), covering about 1.5 million acres in eastern San Bernardino County, was the the Nation's first national scenic area, designated through the California Desert Plan in 1980. It covers about six percent of the California Desert Conservation Area.

A visitor at the entrance to the East Mojave

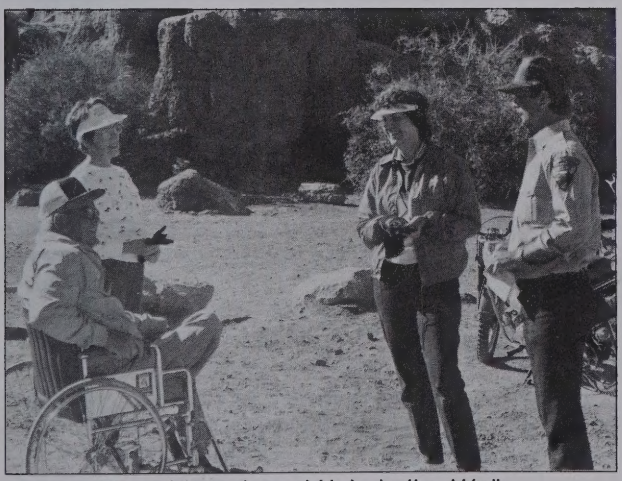
The management philosophy established for this area states that BLM's objective is to "...ensure the continuation of human uses which give the region its special character, and yet give special emphasis to preserving the area's natural and scenic values."

The East Mojave is truly an area of contrasts. Its scenic values include seven rugged areas recommended for wilderness, totaling 292,200 acres; six Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; several ranching operations, where cattle grazing dates back to the late 1800s; historic as well as modern-day mining operations; a transcontinental railroad; popular recreation sites; and a critical powerline corridor.

The California Desert Plan provided a strong framework for managing these diverse uses. Since its completion in 1980, many of its goals for the East Mojave have been met. But as more experience was gained and more studies completed, including projections that visitor use in the area could quadruple in 10 years to 200,000 annual visitors, BLM decided a more site-specific plan was needed.

That plan was recently completed after extensive public review. It lays out an ambitious agenda for enhancing the elements that make the East Mojave special. These include a proposed withdrawal of 90,000 acres from mineral entry to protect the area's scenic and natural values, expansion of visitor facilities, and a study into using the historic Kelso Depot as the central visitor center for the area.

BLM's commitment to carrying out this plan is strong: the 1989 budget of $423,000 compares to only $213,000 allocated in 1988. A full time manager and four Desert Rangers now assist staff in the nearby BLM Needles Resource Area to carry out the East Mojave plan's directives.



Desert travelers at Hole-in-the-Wall

TOUR BEGINS

Depart Las Vegas at 8:00 a.m.
Aerial Viewing Enroute

Utility Corridors

From generating plants in Nevada and Utah, the four transmission lines within the Boulder Energy Production and Utility Corridor, all on public lands, are providing more than 1.7 million volts of electrical power to the Southern California area. Completed in 1944 by the City of Los Angeles, the three original lines transmit AC electrical power generated at Boulder Dam. In 1985, the Intermountain Power Agency, a consortium of consumers including Los Angeles, constructed the fourth line which transmits DC power from coal-fired source in Utah.

Within the East Mojave, there are actually 18 utility lines that pass through, including overhead transmission lines, buried fiber optic and telephone lines, and gas pipelines. There are also six microwave communication sites, with two more proposed for construction later this year.

Clark Mountain

The highest mountain in the East Mojave (7,929 feet), Clark Mountain is capped by a small forest of white fir set among very scenic limestone ridges and canyons. To protect the rugged splendor of the area, a vehicle closure has been in effect since 1973. The Desert Plan designated it as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern in recognition of the mountain's scenic, cultural, and wildlife resources. Large-scale mining operations have dominated the area around the mountain for several decades, for the limestone layers of Clark Mountain are surrounded by highly mineralized metamorphic rocks.

Colosseum Mine

The Colosseum Mine, located at Clark Mountain, near the intersection of Interstate 15 and the California/Nevada border, is operated by Colosseum California, Inc., a subsidiary of an Australian firm. Covering 900 acres of desert landscape, the mine originally operated in the 1860s, but closed down in 1942. The mine was reopened in 1986. The company expects to move 12 million tons of ore to recover 775,000 ounces of gold during the 10-year life of the open-pit operation. The large tailings pond contains waste water from which cyanide has been removed before discharge. This means none of the cyanide solution is exposed to wildlife.

Mountain Pass Mine

Many small mines for lead, zinc, and copper were established in this area between 1900 and the 1920s. Rare earths were not discovered until 1949, well before any market existed. Molycorp bought claims in the area in 1950-1952, and helped develop markets through research and development. This site now produces 97 percent of the United States' supply of rare earth minerals. Rare earths are used as a catalyst for cracking petroleum crudes, in the manufacture of glass-grinding and polishing compounds, as an activator for the red phospher used in color TV tubes, alloys needed to manufacture high-efficiency electric motors, in X-ray technology, supermagnets, and most recently, in the research exploring superconductivity.

Suitable Wilderness Study Areas in the East Mojave

Approximately 50 percent, or 705,000 acres, in the Scenic Area are within a total of 23 wilderness study areas. Seven of these have been recommended suitable by BLM, for a total of 292,200 acres. The seven are:

- Castle Peaks
- Cinder Cones
- Fort Piute
- Granite Mountains
- Kelso Dunes
- Providence Mountains
- South Providence Mountains

New York Mountains WSA under a blanket of snow

Castle Peaks Wilderness Study Area

The Castle Peaks WSA encompasses a region of outstanding scenic and ecological values. Forming the center core of the WSA are the Castle Peaks, a series of prominent reddish spires that can be seen 50 miles away and serve as a landmark for the entire region. The diverse plant life and numerous springs provide an excellent habitat for desert wildlife, including bighorn sheep and mule deer. The WSA also contains some of the best desert tortoise habitat in the eastern Mojave Desert. The area offers outstanding views of adjacent areas, including the Castle Mountains to the south. Educational field study, hiking, backpacking, and other primitive recreation opportunities can be enjoyed throughout the proposed wilderness. Although isolated portions of the area have moderate to high mineral values, BLM recommended most (92 percent) of the WSA as suitable because its exemplary wilderness values outweigh the potential mineral values in this case. If Congress agrees with BLM's recommendation, 44,250 acres would become part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

A desert tortoise explores his domain

Castle Mountain Project

The Castle Mountain project is a proposed gold mine which will process ore from two large pits using the cyanide heap leach method. Viceroy Gold Corporation has conducted an extensive exploration program in the area to determine values and extent of the deposits, and proposes to use approximately 900 acres, including some patented lands, over a 10 year operating period. A draft environmental impact statement in compliance with State and Federal laws has been prepared, and impacts on wildlife from cyanide use and the possible effects of water use on Piute Creek, a perennial stream located 16 miles to the southeast, are carefully evaluated. To comply with the Desert Plan and Scenic Area Plan guidelines, the operator has proposed state of the art reclamation measures as part of the plan of operations. A final decision is expected this fall.

Digging for gold ore in the California Desert

STOP 1-Hart Mining District

Arrive: 8:30 a.m.

Reason for stop:

- Demonstrate the value of minerals in the California Desert.
- Explain the importance of ranching in the East Mojave.
- Illustrate the geologic features of the East Mojave.

Mining for cinders in the East Mojave

Hart Mining District

Although the first claims in this historic mining area were for gold, the Hart District, from the 1920s on gained its fame from the rich, light-colored clay deposits located just above a covering of dark volcanics. The town of Hart developed in response to the gold mining which lasted until 1915. At its peak, the town was a "main street lined with tents for a distance of a half a mile, with side streets, some frame buildings, and 24 businesses," with a population of over 400. Development of the clay deposits began in the 1920s and continued until recently. The clays from this area have been used in glass manufacture (Corning Ware) and ceramics.

Depart: 9:00 a.m.
Aerial Viewing Enroute

Piute Creek/Fort Piute

Piute Range, one of seven suitably recommended wilderness study areas in the East Mojave, contains the Scenic Area's only perennial stream. For about one half mile, Piute Creek runs on the surface, creating a ribbon of comparatively lush vegetation which is a mecca for wildlife and desert visitors. BLM has nearly completed implementing actions called for in the management plan for this Area of Critical Environmental Concern, including transplanting of State-listed endangered elf owls, elimination of tamarisk trees, planting of hundreds of cottonwoods and willows to improve habitat, stabilization of the Fort Piute ruins, and a comprehensive inventory of archeological sites and petroglyphs.

Ruins at historic Fort Piute

Mojave Road

The ancient Mojave Indian trail connecting the Mojave villages along the Colorado River with the California Coast crosses 130 miles of the East Mojave National Scenic Area. The trail was the trade route used by the Indians to exchange food and other products for sea shells and various goods from coastal Indian villages.

Spanish missionary Francisco Graces was shown the trail by Indians in 1776, and by the early 1800s, numerous American mountain men, including Jedediah Smith and Kit Carson, were using the trail.

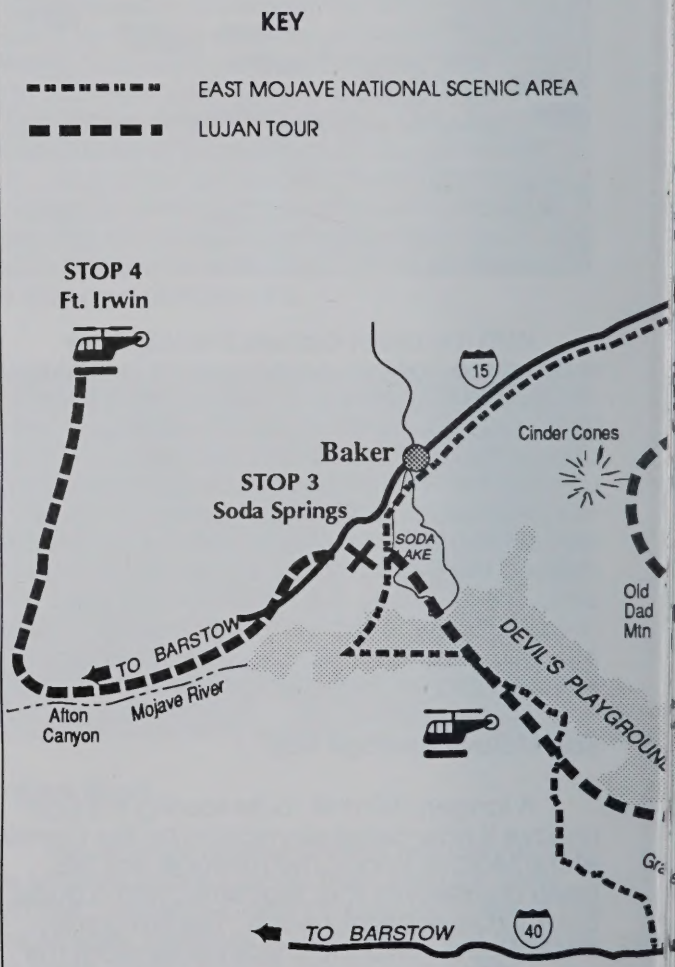
Touring along the Old Mojave Road

With the aid of camels, the U.S. Army shaped the trail into a wagon road in the late 1850s, and it became known as the Mojave Road or Government Road. The trail became one of the most important in the West, being used by the U.S. military, the postal service, and wagon trains of California pioneers. A group called Friends of the Mojave Road located and marked the trail for public enjoyment in the early 1980s. Today, the Mojave Road is a favorite four-wheel drive tour of the East Mojave. It currently is being considered for inclusion into the National Trails System.

East Mojave Heritage Trail

A longer, 700 mile route touring the East Mojave is now being developed by the Friends of the Mojave Road. The Heritage Trail has been divided into four segments, with a guide book to be written for each. The first guide-book, Needles-Ivanpah, was published in the fall of 1987.

EAST MOJAVE NATIC
SCENIC AREA



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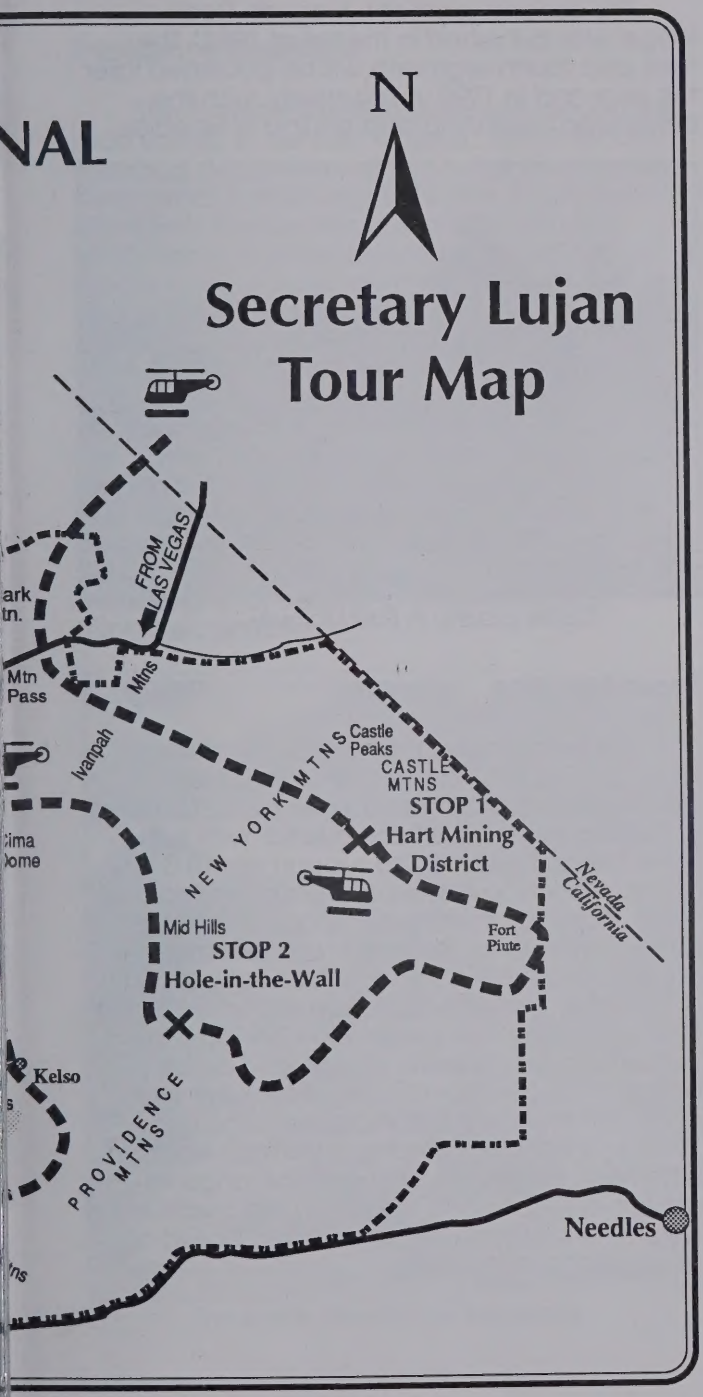
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The second segment, Ivanpah-Rocky Ridge, was published in the fall of 1988. The third and fourth segments will be published later this year and in 1990, respectively, with the entire loop beginning and ending in Needles.

Cattle grazing in East Mojave

Desert Ranching

The East Mojave contains some of the finest grazing land in the California Desert. Eleven grazing allotments cover 1,250,000 acres of Federal land in the Scenic Area, with sufficient forage allocated to support about 3,500 cattle. Ranching in the area dates back to the 1880s. Some of these grazing operations are run by third generation ranchers whose families began operating in this region as early as 1911. Even today, these ranches are important to the local economy. The Desert Plan in 1980 allocated forage to wildlife, burros, and cattle based on vegetation studies. Allotment management plans were completed in the mid-1980s to establish a grazing system for each allotment, determine the need for range improvements (primarily for water), and work out a system for adjusting cattle numbers based on yearly range conditions.

Providence Mountains

The Providence Mountains are among the most scenic in the East Mojave. BLM is recommending designation of two suitable wilderness study areas in the mountains: the 24,200-acre South Providence Mountains WSA and the 59,700-acre Providence Mountains WSA. The area's scenery illustrates the block faulting typical of the Mojave geologic province. Nearby is the State of California's Providence Mountain Recreation Area. The focus of this 5,900-acre area is the Mitchell Caverns, a unique cluster of limestone caves. The bulk of the State lands were acquired through a Recreation and Public Purpose grant from BLM. BLM has established a Desert Information Outpost at the Recreation Area headquarters, and will be implementing Scenic Area plan recommendations for vehicle and firearm use to minimize conflicts.

The scenic Providence Mountains

STOP 2-Hole-in-the-Wall

Arrive: 9:30 a.m.

Reason for stop:

- Officially open the first National Back Country Byway at Wild Horse Canyon Road.
- Explain BLM's recreation program in the California Desert.
- Demonstrate BLM's commitment to protection of public resources through its Desert Ranger program.

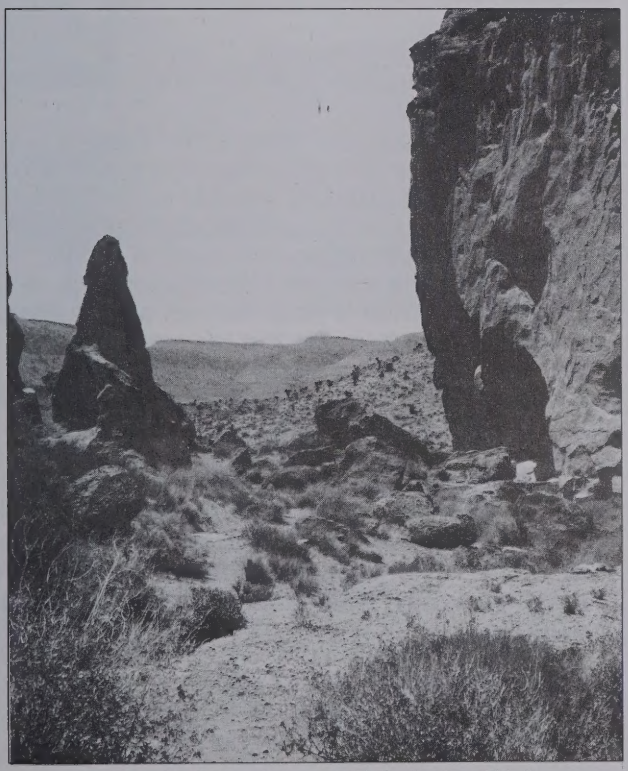
Hole-in-the-Wall

The Hole-in-the-Wall area is well known for its sculpted volcanic rock walls and towers, and for its Old West character. This is cowboy country, with pole corrals, windmills, and loading chutes. Hole-in-the-Wall also has a campground, fire station, and desert information station.

A view of Hole-in-the-Wall country

Wild Horse Canyon Road/
A Back Country Byway

This 11.7 mile road is the first National Back Country Byway. This designation highlights those roads on public lands with exceptional scenic and recreational values. The Wild Horse Canyon Road takes travellers past Wild Horse Mesa, the colorful volcanic formations of Hole-in-the-Wall and Lobo Point, Macedonia Canyon, and Mid Hills Campground. It also offers striking views of Providence Mountains and Kelso Dunes. The vegetation seen from the road includes pinyon-juniper woodlands, cactus gardens, and sage-covered hills reminiscent of the Great Basin. Many visitors consider this route to be the scenic heart of the East Mojave.



Volcanic formations at Hole-in-the-Wall

Depart: 10:15 a.m.
Aerial Viewing Enroute

Mid Hills Campground

The Mid Hills are a low, rounded series of exposed granite crags and boulders. Dense stands of sage and other high desert brush exhibit characteristics of the Great Basin area. Located in a pinyon-juniper woodland, Mid Hills Campground provides a central location for hiking and sightseeing. The northern campsites offer good views of Cima Dome. The existing facilities for the campground were refurbished by BLM this spring, and planning is underway to improve handicapped access, provide extra group camping areas and equestrian facilities, and upgrade the water system.

New York Mountains

One of the highest areas in the East Mojave, the New York Mountains consist of two distinct regions divided by Ivanpah Road. To the west, the mountains are characterized by a steep, eroded north face and a more gently sloping south flank carved by long canyons. A small grove of white fir near the top of Caruthers Canyon is a relic from the last ice age. Several old mines are located along the higher mountain ridges. To the east of Ivanpah Road, the New York Mountains are dominated by a group of very scenic reddish spires known as the Castle Peaks. This section was designated an Area of Critical Environmental Concern in recognition of its significant scenic quality and wildlife and vegetation resources, and has been recommended by BLM as suitable for wilderness designation.

Cima Dome

This 70-square mile, gently rounded granite dome is the most symmetrical domed rock structure in the United States. It is covered by one of the desert's finest Joshua tree forests, which, besides being an intriguing display of an unusual plant community, is also excellent habitat for wildlife. The area is a proposed National Natural Landmark, and is protected by an 18,000-acre withdrawal from mineral entry in effect since 1972.

The Joshua tree forest on Cima Dome

Cinder Cones

To the west of Cima Dome, several layers of ancient lava punctuated by more than 30 extinct volcanic cones are noted for their petroglyph-covered basalts and geologic features. The northern part of the lava field is a suitably recommended wilderness study area. Most of the cones are included in the Cinder Cone National Natural Landmark designated in 1975. Two cinder mines began operations in the 1950s and one continues operating today, providing materials for the Las Vegas market.

Kelso

The community of Kelso owes its existence to the Salt Lake Route of the Union Pacific Railroad. In 1905, the line was finished and Kelso was born, complete with a post office. Water was plentiful from wells and a spring-fed reservoir, and 12 company houses surrounded by tall shade trees formed the second largest settlement on the Salt Lake Route. In 1943, Kelso mushroomed to 1,500 people when Kaiser Steel began operations in the nearby Vulcan Mine. When it closed in 1948, the town returned to railroading as its major employer. When the railroad no longer was dependent upon the water supply for steam engines, the town further shrank in size to less than 50 people.

The historic Kelso Depot

Kelso Depot

Built in the early 1920s, the Kelso Depot is one of two examples of railroad depots built in the pseudo-Spanish style popular at the time. Serving as a busy railroad hub for more than 60 years, the Union Pacific Railroad proposed to demolish the building in 1985. A private organization was formed to preserve the structure, and proposes to reopen it for a variety of new uses, including a restaurant, a BLM Desert Information Outpost and Ranger station, the Kelso post office, and a museum of railroad artifacts. Concentrating on the building's exterior first, volunteers already have restored the sprinkler system, groomed the grounds, and patched and painted the front of the building.

Kelso Dunes

The Kelso Dunes are one of the highest dune systems in North America, rising to a height of 700 feet. Unique flora and fauna seem to flourish in the area, providing outstanding displays of evening primrose, desert willow, desert sunflower, and desert lily, often edged by the symmetrical tracks of native wildlife, frequently lizards and insects. Another unique feature is the Dunes' "booming" nature, caused by shifting sands. Closed to motorized vehicle use since 1973, the 45,000-acre wilderness study area has been recommended by BLM as suitable for wilderness designation.

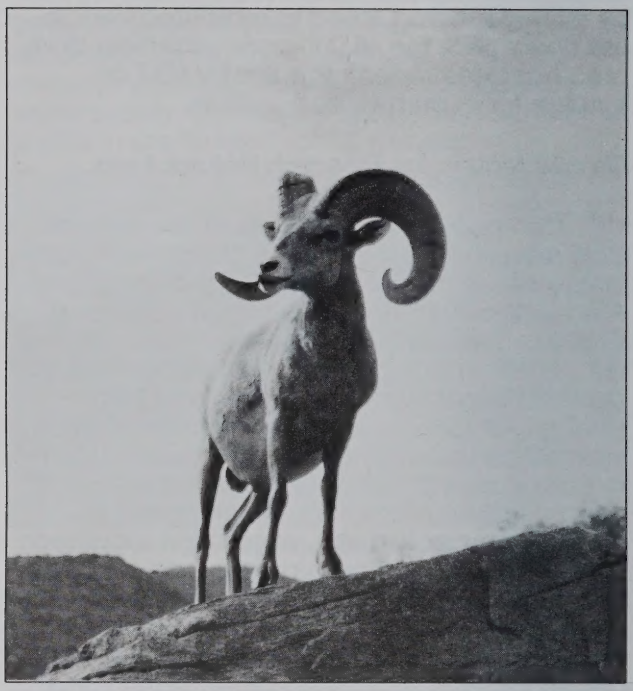
Granite Mountains Research Natural Area

Composed of 2,200 acres of University of California-owned land and 6,720 acres of public lands, the Granite Mountains Research Natural Area is an outdoor classroom for thousands of students. Teaching use is broad-based, ranging from an architecture class specializing in solar passive designs to natural history and field geology classes. In addition, research projects initiated by University and public agency scientists are studying such topics as soil genesis on remnant alluvial fans, root development in heavily compacted soils, vegetation succession in recently burned and grazed areas, and the influence of cattle on desert bighorn sheep. The eastern area has recently been closed to firearms use to provide for public safety for the greatly increasing numbers of recreation and research users. The western portion of the Granite Mountains is a suitably recommended wilderness study area.

Devil's Playground

Sand carried into Soda Lake by historic flooding of the Mojave River has been blown southeast by prevailing winds to cover a large expanse of land known as the Devil's Playground. The region contains important archeological sites and excellent wildlife habitat.

A key landmark in the area is Old Dad Mountain, home to one of the California Desert's largest bighorn herds, and one of the two areas where limited bighorn hunting is permitted by the State Department of Fish and Game. Desertwide, desert bighorn herds have increased 40 percent under the BLM Desert Plan, the result of careful management through installing water developments and removing competing wild burros.



A majestic bighorn sheep surveys his realm

Soda Lake

The only major playa in the East Mojave National Scenic Area is also the lowest area in elevation (920 feet above sea level). The lakebed, where the Mojave River terminates, is closed to vehicle use with the exception of the Mojave Road.

STOP -3 Soda Springs

Arrive: 11:15 a.m.

Reason for stop:

- Recognize the importance of public education about the California Desert at the Soda Orientation Center.
- Explain the BLM's wilderness recommendations.
- Illustrate the concept of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and their relationship to threatened and endangered species.

Soda Springs has had a varied history revolving around its precious source of desert water. It was first a resting stop for Indians, explorers, the military, and settlers; later it became a watering stop for the Tidewater and Tonopah Railroad; and from 1944 to 1974, it was a health and religious resort, founded by Dr. Curtis Springer, called "Zzyzx." Sitting on the western shoreline of Soda Lake, Soda Springs is now the home of the Desert Studies Center, operated under a cooperative agreement between BLM and a consortium of California State Universities. It also is home for the endangered Mojave tui chub, which lives in three ponds fed by the springs. Soda Springs was designated an Area of Critical Environmental Concern by BLM due to its wildlife and cultural resource values.

Lunch hosted by BLM

Soda Orientation Center

The BLM's Soda Orientation Center, located at Soda Springs, is a new public facility designed to introduce Desert visitors to the natural and cultural resources of Soda Springs, the work going on at the Desert Studies Center, and a general orientation to the California Desert and its resources, particularly the East Mojave National Scenic Area. With funding requested by Rep. Jerry Lewis, the BLM built the orientation center, with interpretive panels emphasizing eight different themes, including oasis habitat, the tui chub, general wildlife, plant life, geology, early history, the Zzyzx era, and a timeline of human events.

Two views of the Mojave's oasis, Soda Springs

Depart: 12:45 p.m.
Aerial Viewing Enroute

Afton Canyon

The Mojave River begins in the San Bernardino Mountains near Lake Arrowhead and flows north through Victorville and Barstow where it turns northeastward and eventually disappears in the Devil's Playground. At Afton Canyon, the river has cut a steep-walled gorge through multicolored rock layers. Here the water flows most of the year, attracting wildlife and birds. A detailed plan has recently been completed to improve the riparian or streamside habitat, particularly removal of tamarisk trees. A BLM campground is situated in the canyon.

Fort Irwin Expansion

The Army's Fort Irwin National Training Center, located to the northwest of the East Mojave, covers 34 miles from east to west and about the same from north to south. Currently, there is a proposal from Fort Irwin to expand the facility by some 281,000 acres. BLM is evaluating five alternatives for withdrawal of public lands, including portions of the adjacent areas to the southeast and west of the Fort. A draft environmental impact statement should be ready for public review later this summer. The withdrawal would eventually have to be approved by Congress.

Barstow to Las Vegas Race Start

The famous Barstow to Las Vegas motorcycle race starts within the proposed Fort Irwin expansion. The "start cone" as it is called, is about four miles long. Here, 400 riders begin the race in a wide line. They race toward a strobe light that signals the course is narrowing into a slender corridor.

4-Fort Irwin

Arrive: 1:15 p.m.

Reason for the stop:

- Emphasize military importance of the Desert, particularly in aircraft testing and training.
- Show importance of military airspace and corridors over BLM lands.
- Illustrate problems in changing land classifications that will affect critical military training.

Fort Irwin

Fort Irwin was reactivated in 1981 as the U.S. Army's National Training Center. Units from throughout the U.S. travel to Fort Irwin National Training Center on 20-day training rotations. Using sophisticated laser equipment, each rotation of approximately 3,500 soldiers and their equipment train against a mock "opposing force" permanently stationed at Fort Irwin.

The Secretary and his party will be given a joint briefing by key personnel of military installations in the California Desert, including China Lake Naval Weapons Center, George Air Force Base, Edwards Air Force Base, and Fort Irwin.

Depart: 2:45 p.m. to Sacramento and State Capitol

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TOUR ITINERARY

STOP 1 Hart Mining District

STOP 2 Hole-in-the-Wall

STOP 3 Soda Springs

STOP 4 Fort Irwin

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